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SUBJECT: TUNISIA: ECONOMIC HIGHLIGHTS

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) This cable contains highlights of recent economic developments in Tunisia on the following topics:

- [1](#)A. Tunisia Creates Consumer Agency
- [1](#)B. New, More Comprehensive IPR Law
- [1](#)C. Rain and Subsidies Result in a Strong Cereal Harvest
- [1](#)D. US \$4 million Ecotourism Project in North-West Tunisia

Tunisia Creates Consumer Agency

[1](#)2. (U) On August 7, the GOT announced the creation of the National Consumer Institute. The Institute, an adaptation of a French agency with the same name and mission, will work to improve consumers' purchasing power, carry out market research, and conduct studies of consumer behavior. It will also liaise with existing consumer organizations. Its operations will be financed by the GOT, supplemented by international donors and by proceeds from reports and services. The GOT move to create an agency for consumers reflects the growth of Tunisia's retail sector and Tunisians' expanding appetite for consumer goods.

New, More Comprehensive IPR Law

[1](#)3. (U) A new intellectual property rights law came into effect on June 30 to update the existing 1994 statute. The new law provides expanded legal protection for digital literary and artistic works, drawings, designs and advertising slogans, and computer programs. Copyright protections are extended to lifetime plus fifty years, up from 25 years under the previous law. The Ministry of Commerce and Handicrafts estimates that the market for pirated and counterfeited products represents as much as eight percent of Tunisia's GDP. This upgraded law, if fully implemented, should provide more tools to fight IPR violations and improve Tunisia's investment climate.

Spring Rains Result in a Strong Cereal Harvest

[1](#)4. (U) Thanks to abundant spring rains, Tunisia expects a strong cereal harvest this year with total production estimates of 2.5 million metric tons (MT), based on actual collection figures of 1.1 million MT to date. Last year's harvest was only 1.2 million MT,

down from an average of 1.8 million MT in recent years. This year's strong harvest will help maintain Tunisia's GDP growth. The GOT recently liberalized imports of feed wheat and barley but tightly controls imports of the soft and durum wheat varieties used for bread, couscous, and pasta. This year's harvest is estimated to cover 65 percent of domestic grain consumption, estimated at 2.7 million MT a year. On August 11 the GOT filled the gap with a purchase of 117,000 MT of wheat sourced from the Black Sea region.

\$4 million Ecotourism Project in North West Tunisia

15. (U) The Tunisian village of Beni M'tir, 80 miles west of Tunis and home of Tunisia's warmest hot spring (163 degrees F), is the site of a USD 4 million tourism investment project partially financed by the European Union. The new spa, which will include bungalows equipped with hot-spring Jacuzzis, will be both an eco-tourism and health tourism destination (the hot springs are supposed to treat rheumatism, skin problems, and other ailments). Tunisia is seeking to diversify its tourism base away from mass-market beach resorts toward niche sectors focusing on Tunisia's ecological, cultural, and religious attractions.